

The only thing worse than winning ugly is losing uglier.

The Democrats' ungainly march toward a victory on health care reform Sunday night provoked a graceless response from angry House Republicans, who shouted insults across the chamber, encouraged outbursts from the galleries, brandished "Kill the bill" placards from the Speaker's Balcony and, apparently, left veiled threats of electoral retribution on the benches of undecided Democrats.

And that all came before Texas Republican Rep. Randy Neugebauer shouted "baby killer!" as anti-abortion Rep. Bart Stupak (D-Mich.) spoke on the House floor.

That incident followed an even uglier series of events outside the chamber Saturday, when tea party protesters reportedly shouted the N-word at civil rights hero Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), spit on Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.) and hurled an anti-gay insult at Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

While House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) was quick to criticize the racial and anti-gay outbursts and to distance himself from Neugebauer's shout, he made no apologies for the feisty floor debate or the overall tone of the health care opposition.

"My impression is that Rep. Boehner was satisfied with the tone of the debate, which focused on the serious factual arguments against the Democrats' job-killing government takeover bill," said Boehner spokesman Michael Steel.

Other Republicans weren't so sure.

"It was like a mob at times," lamented one House Republican, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "It wasn't good for us. ... Remember, it took years [for Democrats] to recover from the bad publicity the anti-Vietnam protests generated."

In an interview for POLITICO's "Health Care Diagnosis" video series, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) called the "baby killer" outburst "horrible" but said the issues Democrats are pursuing are "so

polarizing that they're really bringing out emotions and the darker sides of people on both sides."

Still, Ryan made it clear he would have preferred a less emotional approach over the weekend.

"In our conference [Sunday] before the vote, a lot of us said, 'Look - no screaming, no shouting, no yelling, no nyah-nyah-nyah. If they pass this thing, be somber be glum,'" Ryan said. "I said look, 'We've got to be adults about this. This is a serious situation; this isn't something that we politicize. . . . Yes, in basketball games you hear things like this. We don't do that. We're grown-ups.'"

Neugebauer's outburst, which echoed the infamous "You lie!" shout by Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), had Republicans worried about the impact on "persuadables" - independents skeptical about President Barack Obama but leery of the GOP's increasingly conservative tilt.

The incident also undermined attempts by Republicans to project the image of a sober, less combative party willing to meet Obama halfway. And it prompted a salvo of rebuke from Democrats, who spent much of their post-passage Monday accusing the other party of violating the chamber's decorum and coarsening debate.

Stupak accepted Neugebauer's apology - the fiery Texan claimed he was caught up "in the heat and emotion of the debate" - but only barely.

"I feel it is important for members to maintain [the] decorum of the House," said Stupak, who found himself defended by abortion-rights-supporting Democrats with whom he had clashed during the tense final hours of haggling over the bill.

"Over the past year, there have been a couple of incidents on the House floor where outbursts have tarnished Congress's reputation, and I hope there are no further incidents," he added.

"I don't know that I would want to explain to my 6-year-old why I had done or said some of the things that were done or said this past weekend," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters at his Monday briefing. We "ought to be able to have that debate without the type of language and actions that we've seen in some places over the weekend."

Hours before Neugebauer's outburst, several Republicans in the chamber cheered for an anti-reform protester as he was being removed by police, prompting gasps from both sides of the aisle.

Early Sunday, Democrats entered the chamber to discover color photocopies showing the 34 House Democrats who lost their seats after voting for President Bill Clinton's budget bill 17 years ago. The headline: "In 1993 they voted 'yes' and a young president said don't worry it will be OK."

It's not clear who handed out the sheets - there was no name on them - which was a breach of chamber protocol requiring handouts to note their source, according to Brendan Daly, a spokesman for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.).

Then there was the scene on the Speaker's Balcony adjacent to the chamber. All day Sunday, House Republicans walked from the floor to shout encouragement and wave American flags to whip up a crowd of boisterous anti-health-bill protesters.

All of this was accompanied by the more typical chamber mischief used by any party in the minority, including frequent interruptions of opponents with points of order and booing mentions of the president's name.

Several Republicans said their party acted no worse than Democrats did during the Bush years.

"When the CodePinkers and [Michael] Moore et al. were up here, you should've heard some of the things they were saying," said Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.). "At any time there is a heated public debate, people say things they shouldn't say. We don't condone it. ... It wasn't appropriate then, and it wasn't appropriate now."

Walden told POLITICO that the GOP leadership was upset about members inciting people in the gallery.

"They shouldn't" clap, said Walden. "And the leadership said that doesn't belong."

But **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)** said that the outbursts were **"a reflection of widespread passion and anger that exists throughout the country."**

And while he said that such behavior

**"is never helpful,"**

he also suggested that much of the anger stems from the feeling - amplified exponentially by the passage of health care reform - that the country is slipping out of his party's hands.

**"Members of Congress are just people,"** he said. **"We just feel like they are rapidly taking this country in a wrong direction, with no interest in what anyone else thinks and with a taunting arrogance unlike anything I have ever seen. So, yes, people will say things they shouldn't say or do things they shouldn't do, but that is reflective of the intensity we feel about how bad the majority is."**